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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 002160

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DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS; NSC FOR E. MILLARD

LONDON FOR POL/RIEDEL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11-20-02

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [EAID](#) [CE](#) [NO](#) [LTTE](#)

SUBJECT: Joint GSL-LTTE sub-committees on humanitarian and de-escalation issues hold initial meetings

Refs: (A) Colombo 2147

- (B) Colombo 2142, and previous (All Notal)

(U) Classified by Ambassador E. Ashley Wills. Reasons 1.5 (b, d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: The joint GSL-LTTE sub-committees on humanitarian and de-escalation issues recently held their initial meetings. The humanitarian-focused meeting led to an agreement to form a secretariat. The de-escalation meeting led to the first ever face-to-face discussions between the GSL navy and the LTTE's sea wing. A third sub-committee on political issues, also formed at the second session of talks held earlier this month, has not yet met. The proliferation of meetings seems to be broadening the peace process and increasing confidence on both sides. END SUMMARY.

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Sub-Committees Hold First Meetings  
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2. (SBU) Joint Sri Lankan government - Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) sub-committees on humanitarian/reconstruction and de-escalation issues recently held their initial meetings. Along with a sub-committee on political issues, which has not yet met (see Para 8 below), these sub-committees were formed at the second session of GSL-LTTE talks held earlier this month -- see Ref B. According to all reports, both sub-committee meetings were held in a conciliatory atmosphere and were basically introductory in nature.

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Humanitarian/Reconstruction Sub-Committee  
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3. (C) The humanitarian/reconstruction-focused sub-committee met November 18 in Kilinochchi, a major town in the LTTE-controlled Wanni region. (Note: This sub-committee is technically called the "Immediate Humanitarian and Rehabilitation Needs in the North and East Sub-Committee.") S.P. Thamilselvan, the chief of the LTTE's political wing, represented the LTTE side and Ambassador Bernard Goonetilleke, head of the Peace Secretariat, represented the GSL. Norwegian Ambassador

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Jon Westborg participated, as did Japanese Ambassador Seiichiro Otsuka and Motohide Yoshikawa, a representative of GoJ Special Envoy Yasushi Akashi. (Note: See Ref A for comments made by the Japanese Ambassador to Ambassador Wills re this meeting.)

4. (C) Participants at the meeting mainly reviewed procedural issues involved in the sub-committee's operations. Tomas Stangeland, a poloff at the Norwegian Embassy who attended the meeting, told us that the meeting reviewed key priority areas for funding, including issues related to women, displaced persons, and demining. Ideas on the sub-committee's financial structure (the "North-East Reconstruction Fund") were also discussed. According to Stangeland, the major agreements arrived at during the meeting included the decision to form a sub-committee secretariat based in Kilinochchi. An LTTE official would serve as director of the secretariat. The government would nominate one deputy director and another deputy director would represent "minorities" (e.g., Muslims). Stangeland added that the sub-committee had agreed to meet next on December 15-16 and then on January 15-16, 2003.

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De-Escalation Sub-Committee  
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5. (C) The de-escalation sub-committee met for the first time on November 10 in Kilinochchi. (Note: This sub-committee is technically titled "De-Escalation and Normalization Sub-Committee.") Hargrup Haukland, the

Deputy Chief of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM), told us that Defense Secretary Austin Fernando represented the GSL at the meeting and V. Karuna, the LTTE's military commander in the east, represented the Tigers. Haukland said the meeting focused on ways to de-escalate military tensions and ease the burden on local communities caused by GSL "high security zones." The sub-committee is scheduled to meet next on December 15. Haukland noted that the two sides had also agreed to hold "district committee" and expert-level meetings.

16. (C) Flowing out from the initial sub-committee meeting, there have already been several "district committee" and expert-level meetings. The most noteworthy of the expert-level meetings took place on November 13 in the Muhamalai area of Jaffna District. (Note: Muhamalai straddles the no-man's land separating GSL and LTTE forces on the Jaffna Isthmus.) At this meeting, representatives of the Sri Lankan Navy (SLN) and the LTTE's "Sea Tigers" reportedly met for the first time ever. SLMM Chief Trond Furuhoide chaired the meeting. SLN Northern Commander Rear Admiral Sarath Weerasekara led the GSL delegation and Sea Tiger Deputy Chief Seliya led the LTTE team.

17. (C) Haukland said the SLN-Sea Tiger meeting focused on easing fishing restrictions around coastal "high security zones" and also on the issue of LTTE sea movements. The two sides also discussed how to hold firing exercises off the coast. Haukland said additional meetings between the SLN and the Sea Tigers were planned. (Note: Several days after the meeting, the SLN complained that the LTTE's Karuna traveled on a vessel to the east without utilizing proper procedures. The SLMM has expressed concern about Karuna's trip.)

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Political Sub-Committee Yet to Meet  
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18. (C) The third and final sub-committee, focused on political issues, has not yet met. This sub-committee was formed to examine complex political matters, including constitutional, legal, political, and administrative issues. G.L. Peiris, a senior minister, is slated to be the chief GSL representative on the sub-committee, while the chief LTTE representative will be Anton Balasingham, the group's spokesman. Muslim leader Rauf Hakeem is also supposed to serve on the sub-committee. Tomas Stangeland told us that he was not sure when this sub-committee would meet. He thought that Peiris and Balasingham were already in constant contact on political issues and would arrange a formal meeting of the sub-committee at some point soon. Peiris told the Ambassador on November 20 that the first formal meeting of the political sub-committee would take place "right after" the donors' conference in Oslo on November 25.

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COMMENT  
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19. (C) The proliferation of meetings highlights the increasing commitment of the two sides to process-oriented engagement. This, in turn, seems to be deepening the peace process and leading to progress in confidence-building. The fact that leaders of the GSL navy and the Sea Tigers actually met is remarkable, for example -- the two have been nothing short of mortal enemies. With few issues dividing them (at least in public) and the floor open to discourse on multiple issues in multiple fora, government and LTTE ties seem to be on a role entering into the Oslo conference and the third session of talks scheduled to take place in early December. END COMMENT.

110. (U) Minimize considered.

WILLS